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# Film study: Watch for Furman faces in Leatherheads

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## Film study: Watch for Furman faces in *Leatherheads*

When *Leatherheads* fever struck Greenville last winter — the inevitable result, one supposes, when George Clooney, the two-time “Sexiest Man Alive,” comes to town to shoot a movie — Furman people were among the hordes who turned out for casting calls.

The film, a romantic comedy about the early days of pro football, also stars Renée Zellweger and John Krasinski (television’s “The Office”). It’s scheduled to hit theatres April 4.

When it does, watch closely. You might see someone you know.

Like Jim Leavell, professor emeritus of history and Asian Studies. He was designated the “cue guy” for one crowd scene. Leavell’s job was to take off cheering, and the rabble was to follow his lead. Evidently, the part of “cue guy” requires that you have a Ph.D.

Then there’s Will Bouton ’02, a football All-American in his student days. His character actually has a name, if not a speaking role: Big Boy Rawlings, a menacing linebacker who’s out to get Clooney in the film’s big game.

How did Bouton, who works in Greenville for Massachusetts Mutual, land the plum part? “I think they were looking for the biggest, ugliest guy they could find,” he says modestly.

The football extras were on call for a number of weeks, so Bouton got to know many of the cast and crew. During breaks he arranged for Clooney and his cronies to play basketball at Greenville’s First Baptist Church — much to the delight of the FBC Kindergarten’s all-female staff.

“One day there were about 15 or 20 women watching us from the floor above,” says Bouton. “We thought no one knew George was there, but apparently the word got out.”

Bill Berg, director of planning and institutional research, was cast as a barber. After he got into costume, someone shoved a shaving

mug at him and said, “You’re going to give George a shave.” And then Clooney bounded in with a “Hey, how ya doin’?”

Before Berg could react, the cameras were rolling. So he began lathering up Clooney, who, in his dual role of actor/director, suggested that Berg pick up the straight razor, pinch his nose and make a few “swoopy” motions across his neck and face.

Nothing like having the star’s life in your hands.

Then Clooney delivered a line from the script, to which the bewildered Berg says he nearly responded, “Are you talking to me?” Fortunately, he managed a more “in-character” response.

“I was just trying not to look at the camera,” says Berg.

And we would be remiss to omit Marketing and PR’s own John Roberts. Roberts, who is also Furman’s rugby coach, plays a referee. His discovery that he’s in the film’s trailer was a high point in recent departmental history: “There I am! That’s me! There I am again!”

Other Furman folks had their moments, such as Tom ’91 and Angela Wood ’90 Riddle, both Greenville County educators, and their three sons.

Tom Riddle was initially chosen to be a football player — only to be cut two days later. The next week, though, he was called back to portray a referee.

After that day of filming, Riddle and his family were asked to be in a scene that would be shot in nearby Ware Shoals, which had a stadium that actually dated from the ’20s. “Ware Shoals is where I played high school football,” says Riddle, who also coached the sport for 16 years, “so I was doubly thrilled to have a chance to work on that set.”



COURTESY JIM LEAVELL

Among the Furman folks who worked on the film were, from left, Will Bouton ’02, Ed Marshall (director of special projects) and professor emeritus Jim Leavell.

While Tom and Angela were relegated to the crowd at Ware Shoals, their sons Ben, Nick and Jon were in several different shots, working mostly with Krasinski. Ben appears in the trailer and in one of the studio “still” photos. After the day’s shoot, Ben presented Clooney a picture he had drawn for him, and the star — who charmed the locals throughout filming — cheerfully posed for a family portrait.

Two days later, on a Sunday morning, Angela got a call that women were needed to film some scenes in downtown Greenville. Even though the family was “already dressed for church and heading out the door,” Tom says, “for some reason Angela chose to work with Clooney instead. Go figure.”

Hopefully, the talents of these and other Furman folks will make it into the final cut. Whatever the case, the opportunity to be part of a major motion picture — and to work with the stars — was one that none of them will forget.

— JIM STEWART

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